

Title: The Morning after of *Cesky Sen*

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Does the pharmaceutical giant Merck really care about you? Does Merck really care about its patients? And if one could prove that it didn't but it said it did would we expose Merck once and for all for the evil bloodsucking baby-killing machine that it is? Is it [always already] better in the Bahamas, and if each and every Jamaican is not nice to you on Jamaica, as their tourist board promises, are you within your rights to sue the island?

The 2003 Czech film *Cesky sen* can't help but raise these questions, variable in type, of course, but fundamentally the same in kind, for all its audiences. The Western and especially Anglophone press call the film, for the most part, a 'triumphant' wag the dog documentary, waging tricky war on post-revolutionary consumerist Czechia; the Czech critics have also embraced the film, but are bolder and balder to call it, in the original Czech, a "reality show". Regardless of the provenance of the reading—'Western', or 'Central European'—the consensus seems to be that this film is "a wake up call [maybe] for Europe".

These latter claims, as evidently reasonable as they are, are spurious to me for their cynical saturation. In this paper I hope to undo the easy cynical 'cheeky' raves about the 'cheeky' film and go for the jugular, violent, and bloody cheekiness of the film.

My look at the documentary film/reality show is less concerned, with its spoof of capitalist desire, and the place of the Czech dream (*cesky sen*) within that desire, than it is with the ability of the "reality show" or documentary to make inroads as a medium into the violent disruption of desire. That is to say, might there not be a reticulated kynical mode to the documentary film qua cheeky reality show? Famously, Peter Sloterdijk has made the kynotic radical of cheekiness clear, and it is with his theses on kynical cheekiness—in which he quite productively calls on the Czech tradition, most auspiciously with the invocation of author and drunkard Jaroslav Hasek, that sparks my interrogation of *Cesky Sen*: "Since [...] kynicism has made speaking the truth dependent on the factors of courage, cheekiness, and risk, the process of truth gets caught in a previously unknown moral tension [...]" That moral tension has provoked even Václav Havel to defend the film's "lies" with the well-worn retaliation that, hey, all art is a lie ["In my opinion, the film is really very good. If some people reproach it for being based on a lie or for deceiving people, then I have to say that such could apply to all films by Miloš Forman and that that's the way things are. If we want to get to the core of a certain problem, we have to be tough in the interest of a good thing"].

But what if there were no lie here at all? What if Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda, the films directors, stars, and agent-provocateurs, deployed the specific and especial modes and potentialities of documentary film to make their absolutely cynically honest point? And is that point well-bloodied because of how they used film?

Sloterdijk calls the tension of lie and truth, the dialectic that inheres in kynosis, a "*dialectic of disinhibition*." I take issue with some of Sloterdijk's points about the power of the full-on cheeky as ideological overthrow, but, cradled in the notion of the kynical (as the negation of the negation of the cynical), I wish to open up in this paper the possibility of the film *Cesky Sen* as not just a 'feel good about feeling bad about ourselves' film, not just "a stunt film that would make Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock proud"—such opinions for me keep the film in a cynical mode where it is despoiled and enervated. There is another target other than supermarkets and capitalist goods and advertising, etc, etc. and that is cynicism. The success of the film's cheeky kynosis (with its bathos, its hilarity, its tragedy, its self-immolation, its "optimistic tragedy")—are due to its celebratory debunking of cynical laughter. Irony, it seems to me, has been rescued from its post-modern cooption in this film, and, what's more, the possibility that 'cleverly objective cynicism (Spurlock's, Moore's, James Moore and Wayne Slater's, Riefenstahl's, and possibly even Forman's) could be demystified is, dare I say, *only* achievable in cheeky "reality show" film.

